

Chautauqua Script

Emily

Thank you all so much for being with us today. My name is Edith Emerson and today we are here to mourn the death of a beloved father, husband, and writer, Ralph Waldo Emerson. More importantly, we are here today to celebrate a life. My father was a very spirited man who not only experienced life to the fullest but made an impact on more lives than I could ever hope to touch.

My father was born in Boston Massachusetts on May 25th, 1803. Due to the early death of his father, he was raised by his mother with the help of his Aunt. My father attended Boston Latin School and went on to graduate from Harvard. My father met his early wife Ellen Louisa Tucker, in Concord, New Hampshire on Christmas Day, 1827, and married her when she was 18. Less than two years later, Ellen died at the age of 20 on February 8, 1831 of tuberculosis. My father then went on to serve as a junior pastor at Boston's second church. My father quickly discovered that his beliefs differed from that of the church and he set out to tour Europe. He spent several months in Italy, Rome, and England meeting William Wordsworth, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, and Thomas Carlyle. My father expressed that Carlyle in particular was a strong influence and someone he admired greatly.

My father returned to the United States on October 9, 1833, and lived with his mother in Newton, Massachusetts, until October, 1834, when he moved to Concord, Massachusetts, to live with his step-grandfather. Seeing the budding Lyceum movement, which provided lectures on all sorts of topics, my father saw a possible career as a lecturer. On November 5, 1833, he made the first of what would eventually be some 1,500 lectures, discussing The Uses of Natural History in Boston. In this lecture, he set out some of his important beliefs and the ideas he would later develop in his first published essay Nature which I am sure you are all very familiar with. It is by far my favorite of my father's writings.

On January 24, 1835, my father wrote a letter to Lydia Jackson, asking for her hand in marriage. Her acceptance reached him by mail on the 28th. In July 1835, he bought a house on the Cambridge and Concord Turnpike in Concord, Massachusetts which he named "Bush"; Don't ask me why, I have yet to understand my father's intent. My father quickly became one of the leading citizens in the town. He gave a lecture to commemorate the 200th anniversary of the town of Concord on September 12, 1835. Two days later, he married my mother, Lydia Jackson in her home town of Plymouth, Massachusetts, and they moved to the new home in Concord together with my Grandmother Emerson on September 15.

My father quickly changed my mother's name to Lidian, and would call her Queenie,[50] and sometimes Asia, and she called him Mr. Emerson. They were soon blessed with four children. Ellen, Waldo, Edward and myself. We were never entirely wealthy but my father always taught us to be thankful and we were always provided for.

A few years ago, my father's health began declining, he started having memory problems and began to suffer from aphasia. He forgot his own name at times but, when anyone asked how he felt, he responded, "Quite well; I have lost my mental faculties, but am perfectly well".

Our home caught fire on July 24, 1872 and the fire marked an end to the majority of my father's lecturing career; from then on, he would lecture only on special occasions and only in front of familiar audiences.

While my parents' house was being rebuilt, my father and sister took a trip to England, continental Europe, and Egypt. Everyone was so excited when he finally returned to Concord that the entire town celebrated and school was canceled that day. He truly was loved by those around him.

On April 21, 1882, my father was diagnosed with pneumonia. Today we will bury him in Sleepy Hollow Cemetery, Concord, Massachusetts. And I believe that although he is not here in body, my father has left an impact that will create a legacy. For a man like him is not easily forgotten.

Dani

I would also like to thank you very much for coming to my father's service today.

For those of you whom I do not know, I am Ellen Tucker Emerson. I have been a life-long resident of Massachusetts and an active member of the community. I have used my time to look after my parents who traveled to Britain, Europe, and Egypt. I was extremely close with my father. In my teenage years when I was sent to boarding school in the town of Lenox in Western Massachusetts, my

father was my correspondent and advisor on educational matters. Even in my father's final years I helped him keep his place with his lecture papers and assisted James Elliot Cabot in editing his manuscripts. Like my father, I enjoy writing and I am currently writing a biography of my mother. I am a member of Concord's School Committee, and teach Sunday school at the First Parish and arrange the social dances in the Town Hall.

Again, thank you for coming to this service to celebrate the life of a man that has had such an impact on our society and ways of thinking. It is true that my father did not really conform to traditional religion. Instead, he asks in his first essay, *Nature*, "Why should we not also enjoy an original relationship to the universe?" I know that you have all probably read this essay since it is so popular, but I want you to know that his purpose for the essay is that we should recover for the present generation the direct and immediate relationship with the world that our ancestors had. In order to find answers to the question of how one should live, he insists that we need only to turn to nature itself.

The publishing of *Nature* is usually considered the time that the Transcendentalist movement became a major cultural movement. In the same year, the Transcendental Club was founded in Cambridge, Massachusetts, on September 8, 1836, by my father and a few other prominent individuals (George Putnam and Frederick Henry Hedge.) However, as we can clearly see in these times, transcendentalists vary greatly in their interpretations of the practical aims of will. My father considered it to be exclusively an individualist and idealist project, in contrast to those who linked it to socialism or a utopian social change. He even suggested that an entirely transcendental outlook on life was impossible to attain in practice in his 1842 lecture, *The Transcendentalist*.

Following this ground-breaking, he gave a speech entitled *The American Scholar* in 1837, which Oliver Wendell Holmes, Sr. considered to be America's "Intellectual Declaration of Independence". In the speech, my father declared literary independence in the United States and urged Americans to create a writing style all their own and free from Europe. He says in the essay, "We will walk on our own feet; we will work with our own hands; Divine Soul which also inspires all men."

My father wrote most of his important essays as lectures first, then revised them for print. His first two collections of essays – *Essays: First Series* and *Essays: Second Series*, published respectively in 1841 and 1844 – represent the core of his thinking, and include such well-known essays as *Self-Reliance*, *The Over-Soul*, *Circles*, *The Poet* and *Experience*. Together with *Nature*, these essays made the decade from the mid-1830s to the mid-1840s my father's most inspired period.

I believe that on this day when we say goodbye to him, he would want us to think of these words. In his essay *Self-Reliance*, he says:

- What I must do is all that concerns me, not what the people think.
- Insist on yourself; never imitate.
- Nothing can bring you peace but yourself. Nothing can bring you peace but the triumph of principles.
- Whoso would be a man must be a nonconformist.
- Trust thyself: every heart vibrates to that iron string.

If I can offer you my view of how my father's works will continue to affect the world, it is this: My father, Ralph Waldo Emerson, will remain the major American philosopher of the nineteenth century and in some respects the central figure of American thought since the colonial period. Perhaps due to his highly quotable style, he will wield a celebrity unknown to subsequent American philosophers. The general reading public will know my father's work primarily through his sayings and quotes, which will appear throughout popular culture on calendars and posters, on boxes of tea and breath mints, and of course through his individual essays. Generations of readers will continue to encounter the more famous essays under the rubric of "literature" as well as philosophy, and indeed the

essays, less so his poetry, will stand undiminished as major works in the American literary tradition. His emphasis on self-reliance and nonconformity, his championing of an authentic American literature, his insistence on each individual's original relation to God, and finally his relentless optimism, that "life is a boundless privilege," will remain his chief legacies.

Kami

I am honored and humbled to be able to speak at this remarkable man's funeral. My name is Samuel Osgood and I am a Unitarian minister. Though today may be a constant reminder of his death I want to only speak of his life's work—specifically his work on the essay *Nature*. I have had the privilege of reviewing his work before and I did a fine job in 1837 if I do say so myself, so I will repeat some of my previous statements.

Emerson had a connection to nature that many of us adults have forgotten and chose to ignore with our maturity. Like I have said before, "Whatever may be thought of the merits, or of the extravagances of the book, no one, we are sure, can read it, without feeling himself more wide awake to the beauty and meaning of Creation" I thank Emerson for reminding us of God's hand in our lives every day.

"Coming to the chapter on Idealism, many will be tempted to shut the book in disgust, and lament, that so sensible a man as the writer has before shewn himself to be, should shew such folly. And we ourselves doubt much the wisdom of the speculation in this chapter, although we would not call him insane, who thinks the material world only ideal," It is not our place to extort God's creation, as if we were the ones to discover its beauty and power and I believe Emerson is touching this idea of Idealism, but "We are unable to perceive the bearing of the writer's argument, in proof of Idealism, or to allow the advantage, which he claims for his theory. All his arguments, it seems to us, go to prove merely the superiority of mind over matter."

Now I don't want everyone to believe that I always agree with my late friends ideas, and I assume it would not be in his temperament to allow me too. "It may indeed naturally seem, that the author's mind is somewhat one-sided, that he has not mingled enough with common humanity, to avoid running into eccentricity, that he has been so careful to keep his own individuality, that he has confounded his idiosyncrasies, with universal truth. All this may be. But it is not for the vulgar many to call such a man a dreamer. If he does dream, the many are more deluded dreamers. His dreams are visions of the eternal realities of the spiritual world: theirs are of the fleeting phantoms of earth." You cannot deny that he has the gift to see what our calloused hearts ignore, I think it is only fitting God give him this talent, "So he learns the high truths which nature teaches."

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